



TALKING POINTS - February 2013

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM



- We are/I am _____ and we want to speak with you about immigration reform. As you should know, both President Obama and Speaker Boehner have stated that this issue should be a priority in the 113th Congress. Our purpose is to inform you what we believe, from a Catholic perspective, should be included in any immigration reform bill.
- Of course, the Catholic Church's interest in immigration dates back until the birth of the nation, as our Church is an immigrant church which has grown with the nation. So, we see the human consequences of the broken immigration system in our parishes, social service agencies, hospitals, and schools. Families are being divided, migrant workers are being exploited, and human beings are dying in the desert under the current system.
- First, we strongly believe there needs to be a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented in our country. This is not an amnesty, as those who qualify would have to pay back taxes, a fine, acquire English proficiency, and wait their turn to obtain permanent residency and citizenship. If the undocumented are given only legal status, then we are sanctioning a permanent underclass in our society. We would have a large number of persons who do not possess the same rights as the majority.
- Second, we strongly believe that family unity should remain the cornerstone of our nation's immigration system. In this regard, we support preserving and improving the family-based immigration system, so that families can reunite more expeditiously. (Current, a Mexican LPR must wait seven years for his/her spouse and children to join them through legal channels.) We would oppose the elimination of any family-based categories and would support changes which would expedite family reunification, such as the reduction of backlogs, the reallocation of unused family visas, and the classification of spouses and children of Legal Permanent Residents as immediate family members. We would oppose transferring permanent visas from the family categories to the employment categories. Congress can increase employment visas without raiding the family system.
- We would support a program for unskilled workers to enter the country safely and legally (known as a temporary worker program), so that they are not dying in the desert, provided it contains safeguards for workers. Such a program would provide work authorization and include appropriate worker protections for U.S. and foreign-born workers, as well as an option to earn citizenship. Properly constructed and implemented, such a program would help us better control who enters the U.S. for purposes of work, allow migrants to enter safely and legally, and serve our nation's economic needs.

- On enforcement, we have spent as much as \$150 billion since 2000, while the number of undocumented has increased from 7 million in 2000 to 11 million today. \$16 billion was spent last year on immigration enforcement, more than any other enforcement agency in the federal government, including the FBI. A record 411,000 immigrants were deported last year, with about 100,000 parents deported and separated from their U.S. –citizen children. This hurts children and family unity.
- Clearly, our nation must reject an enforcement-only immigration policy; a more comprehensive approach is needed. We would support an electronic employment verification system, provided the undocumented population is given a path to citizenship and are legally part of the system. However, we would like to see due process protections restored for immigrants, including elimination of the one-year filing deadline for asylum-seekers and elimination of the 3 and 10-year bars. We would oppose the criminalization of immigrants who cross the border.
- Moreover, we would like to see more attention paid to why migrants feel compelled to come to the United States (push factors) and the adoption of economic policies that would enable them to find living-wage jobs in their home countries. At a minimum, we should examine our international economic policies to ascertain whether they inadvertently push low-skilled workers to come to the United States, thus increasing illegal immigration. Migrants have a right not to migrate, so they can support their family in dignity in their home countries. Sustained economic development supports human dignity and life.
- Finally, attention should be paid to how such a bill would be implemented, including appropriate funding and infrastructure to ensure that registration and applications are handled in a timely manner. NGOs who work in immigrant communities should be used to market the program and help to identify and register potential applicants.

Where can I find more information on Comprehensive Immigration Reform?

Visit: Department of Migration and Refugee Services: uscmb.org/mrs
 Justice for Immigrants Campaign: justiceforimmigrants.org